

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The Alameda County CMA Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) Program has been in operation since April 9, 1998. This report presents the results of the sixth annual program evaluation and covers program operations during 2003 including comparison with previous years. The evaluation provides information about:

1. The effectiveness of the program's administration;
2. Statistics on employer and employee participation and trips taken;
3. The program's success in causing an increase in the use of alternative modes; and
4. Recommendations about any area(s) that need modification or expansion.

This executive summary includes a program description, overview of historical trends, summary of major findings of the evaluation, and program recommendations.

## Program Description

The Alameda County CMA Guaranteed Ride Home Program is sponsored by the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency (CMA) and is funded with Transportation Funds for Clean Air (TFCA) from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

The GRH Program provides a "guaranteed ride home" to any registered employee working for a participating employer in cases of emergency on days the employee has used an alternative mode of transportation to get to work. Alternative modes include: carpools, vanpools, bus, train, ferry, walking and bicycling. Participating employers must have at least 100 employees at worksites located in Alameda County. As of December 31, 2003, 110 employers and 2,785 employees were registered with the program.

The objective of the program is to maximize modal shift from driving alone to commute alternatives including transit, carpools, vanpools, bicycling and walking. Based on this stated objective, the program can be considered a success. Each year of operation, the program has seen an increase in the number of participants who use alternative modes and an increase in the frequency with which they use alternative modes.

## Historical Trends

The Guaranteed Ride Home Program began as a demonstration program in 1998. Over the course of the last six years, GRH has grown into a smoothly operating program with 110

registered employers, nearly 2,800 registered employees, and about 150 trips provided each year.

Although the total number of employers registered declined in 2003, the number of new employers registered last year increased compared with recent years. Seventy-two (72) employers registered with the program during the initial six-month demonstration period. Another 28 registered during the 1999 operating year, and 19 registered during the 2000 operating year. In 2001 and 2002, 13 and 12 new employers joined the program, respectively. Fourteen (14) new employers registered in 2003. The program now has a total of 110 participating employers. The total number of registered employers has decreased from recent years because several employers have either relocated (outside Alameda County), gone out of business, or lost interest in the GRH program.

During the initial six-month demonstration period, about 880 employees joined the Guaranteed Ride Home Program. Another 794 joined during the 1999 operating year, and 591 in the 2000 operating year. In 2001 and 2002, 494 and 525 new employees joined, respectively. In 2003, the number of new employees registered for the program rivaled its first years of operation with 710 new employee participants. The program now has nearly 2,800 registered employees.

A total of 824 trips have been provided from the time of the Program's inception through the end of 2003. During the 2003 operating year, 149 trips were taken, consistent with recent years (148 in 2001 and 144 in 2002). Most registered employees (89%) never take a trip. Of those who have taken trips, the vast majority (81%) have taken only one or two trips. This demonstrates the "insurance" nature of the program.

Based on the fact that each registered participant may take up to six trips in a one-year period, the rate that guaranteed rides are taken is very low. For example, at the end of 2003, there were a total of 16,710 potential rides based on a total enrollment of 2,785 employees. However, only 149 trips were actually needed that year (less than 1% of potential trips).

Figure ES-1 illustrates some key historical trends for the Guaranteed Ride Home Program.

**Figure ES-1 Guaranteed Ride Home Program Historical Trends**

<b>Trend</b>	<b>1998<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
<b>Program Participants<sup>2</sup></b>						
Total Number of Employers	72	100	119	132	127	110
New Employers Registered	72	28	19	13	12	14
Total Number of Employees	880	1,674	2,265	2,759	2,664	2,785
New Employees Registered	880	794	591	494	525	710
<b>Trip Statistics</b>						
Total Number of Trips Taken	57	156	168	148	144	149
Total Number of Rental Car Trips					8	10
Average Trips per Month	6.3	13.0	14.0	12.3	12.0	12.4
Average Trip Distance (miles)	28.7	36.2	37.8	42.5	42.9	45.2
Average Trip Cost	\$54.51	\$64.29	\$69.73	\$86.37	\$88.07	\$94.19
<b>Survey Results</b>						
Number of Surveys Collected	215	350	270	346	517	619
Survey Response Rate	N/A	21%	12%	12%	19%	22%
Percent Who Would Not Use an Alternative Mode Without GRH	15%	16%	19%	19%	34%	41% <sup>3</sup>
Increase in the Percent of Those Using Alternative Modes Four or More Times a Week	N/A	10%	15%	8%	15%	17%

1 The Program began in April of 1998.

2 The number of new employers and employees registered in previous years is actually higher than shown in the table. Some employers and employees have been deleted from the database due to job changes and employers going out of business. The numbers shown in the table are based on those currently registered in the database.

3 This figure includes 12% of respondents who stated that they would discontinue using alternative modes and go back to driving alone, as well as 29% of respondents who stated that they would use alternative modes less frequently.

## Major Findings of the Evaluation

The program evaluation consisted of an examination of the program's administrative functions, statistics on employer and employee participation and use, data from the surveys of participating employees, and recommendations for program changes and enhancements. The following sections present the major findings from the evaluation.

### Program Administration

#### Program Operating Principles

The eligibility requirement for employers to have 100+ employees should be reconsidered. Our experience administering the program has indicated a strong correlation between the success of a program in registering employees and the commitment of employer contact rather than the number of employees with the employer. Marketing time and expense is more efficiently concentrated on employers with representatives who have time and inclination to promote the program rather than those who have a lot of employees. Reducing or eliminating this threshold would more effectively accomplish program goals by reducing marketing time spent (in the form of "cold calls") on contacting large employers with no interest in the program. This recommendation is discussed in greater detail at the end of the Executive Summary under recommendations.

The process of enrolling and getting an emergency ride home continues to work smoothly.

- The use limitation of six trips per year continues to be appropriate. Very few program participants reach the limit. None reached the limit in 2003, and only two people took five rides, and five people took four rides.
- The rental car program has realized an estimated savings of over \$1,100 on ride costs compared to if those rides were taken by taxi, and participants who used rental cars were please with the flexibility and convenience of this new option.

#### Marketing and Promotions

- Approximately one-tenth of program resources are dedicated to marketing and promotion. This time is spent marketing both to employers and their employees in the form of making calls, distributing flyers, and giving presentations and events. The program has sought to leverage these resources by relying on participating employers to promote the GRH Program internally, and by seeking co-marketing opportunities with local transit agencies and with organizations that promote commute alternatives. However, employers who are not interested in the program cause a higher portion of time and money to be spent on marketing and administration.
- The availability of the marketing materials in electronic format continues to be a useful and inexpensive tool for promoting the program.

## **Employer and Employee Participation**

### **Employer and Employee Registrations**

- Both the number of new employers and new employees increased in 2003. However, the total number of registered employers actually declined from recent years due to a high number of employers being identified as “inactive” because they have relocated (out of Alameda County), gone out of business or lost interest in the GRH Program. As of December 31, 2003, 110 employers and 2,785 employees were registered.
- North and east Alameda County continue to be the areas with the most employers enrolled in the program. A large percentage of registered employers are located in Pleasanton, partly because of the concentration of employers in the Hacienda Business Park (where all employers are eligible regardless of size because of their location in the business park which includes over 400 employers).

### **Trips Taken**

- Through 2003, a total of 824 trips (806 taxi trips and 18 rental car trips) have been taken. 149 trips were taken during the 2003 calendar year for an average of 12.4 trips per month. The number of trips taken in 2003 was consistent with recent years.
- Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the employees enrolled have never taken a trip. Of the 422 employees who have taken a trip since program inception (1998), 81% have taken only one or two rides.
- Personal illness was the most common reason for taking a trip in 2003 (30% of trips), followed by unscheduled overtime (26%).
- Those who carpool or vanpool are more likely to use a guaranteed ride home trip than those who use other alternative commute modes. Sixty-four percent (64%) of guaranteed rides home were used by car- and vanpoolers.
- The average trip distance has increased every year of the program. The average trip distance for all trips in 2003 was 45.2 miles. The average trip distance for rental car trips only was 72.5 miles. This indicates an even greater cost saving from the rental car program because the cost to rent a car is fixed while taxi rides cost more for longer trips.
- The average taxi trip cost has increased every year of the program. The average taxi trip cost in 2003 was \$97.01.
- The rental car program is new to the 2003 Program year and has proven to provide significant cost savings. The cost of a rental car trip is \$55.00. It is estimated that the use of rental cars in 2003 saved \$1,120 in trip costs.

### **Employee Commute Patterns**

- The most common trip-origin cities are Pleasanton and Oakland. The most common trip-destination cities are Oakland, Manteca and Tracy.

- The most common trip destination county is Alameda County, followed by San Joaquin, Contra Costa and Solano Counties. These four counties comprise 70% of the trip destinations.

## **Employee Survey**

The 2003 survey differed from past surveys in that it was distributed and completed primarily online. We attempted to contact all employer representatives (some were non-responsive despite repeated attempts) to request their assistance with the distribution of the survey. When employers were not available or by special request, we contacted employees with the survey directly. Of the 2,785 employees currently enrolled in the program, 619 surveys were completed, resulting in a 22% response rate, an increase from last year's 19% response rate. Of them, 478 (77%) surveys were completed online. The respondents represent 55 different participating employers, or approximately 73% of all active employers with one or more employees registered with the program. Both employer and employee participation has increased this year probably due to the ease of completing the survey electronically.

## **Use of Alternative Modes**

The Guaranteed Ride Home Program continues to be successful in encouraging the use of alternative modes. According to 2003 survey responses:

- When asked how important GRH was in their decision to stop driving alone, 78% of respondents who used to drive alone said that it was at least somewhat important. Most, 61%, of all respondents reported that the GRH program encourages them to use alternative modes more days than they would otherwise. If the GRH Program were not available, the majority (59%) reported that they would continue to use an alternative mode.
- The survey asked respondents how they traveled to work at present and before they registered for the GRH program. Both before and after the program, the most common modes were BART, driving alone, and carpooling. Program participants reported a 54% reduction in the number of days they drive alone since enrolling in GRH. Compared with past years' survey findings, more participants are using alternative modes 4 or more days per week, and fewer one or fewer days.
- Using these survey findings, we are able to extrapolate the impact of the program on travel behavior of all participants. The program reduces nearly 30 thousand miles of single occupancy vehicle travel and close to one thousand single-occupancy vehicle (SOV) trips per day. When annualized and compared with program costs, GRH costs \$13.47 per thousand SOV miles reduced and \$0.45 per SOV trip reduced.

## **Other Commute Characteristics**

- Commute distances are generally 50 miles or less (88%). Half (50%) are between 11 and 35 miles.

- Most (69% each) program participants travel to work during peak commutes hours of 7-9 AM and 4-6 PM.
- About half (52%) of respondents do not drive alone to access their primary commute mode of transit or ridesharing.

### **Customer Service Ratings**

The survey includes two questions to evaluate participant's level of satisfaction with the customer service provided in the program. Additional information on service satisfaction is collected in the survey participants return after they have taken a ride.

- The administrative functions of the GRH Program continue to receive very high ratings for the quality of customer service, consistent with previous years' evaluations.
- Passengers were very positive in their evaluation of the transportation services provided through GRH. However, wait time for a taxi was slightly longer than stipulated in the contract (74% waiting 15 minutes or less – it should be 80% – and 7% waiting longer than 30 minutes – it should be none). One passenger waited for 75 minutes for Friendly Cab on one occasion. When we receive complaints about long wait times, we follow-up with the appropriate provider. If complaints become more frequent, the taxi providers are aware that we will discontinue their contracts.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Continue to implement a comprehensive marketing approach.**

In 2003, marketing efforts will focus on 1) co-marketing with other programs promoting commute alternatives; 2) direct marketing to employers (through RIDES or directly to employers from a list, if we buy one); 3) maximizing program exposure via the internet and other media; and 4) maintenance marketing and outreach activities directed to inactive (or minimally active) employers throughout Alameda County. Following is a further explanation of some of these efforts:

- **Continue co-marketing efforts with other organizations that promote commute alternatives.**

The GRH Program will continue to focus on building partnerships with other organizations that promote commute alternatives, including RIDES, local transit agencies, vanpool providers and commute benefit providers (such as Commuter Check).

- **Continue to directly market the program to large employers in the county as well as large business and office parks.**

We will work with cities and chambers of commerce to identify large employers and business/office parks in the county who have not yet received information about the GRH program. We will target marketing efforts at these employers, particularly those



who are located in underrepresented areas. We should also consider purchasing a list of major employers from InfoUSA for \$200 and contact them about GRH (which would take about 90 hours from other types of program marketing).

- **Contact inactive, or minimally active, employers who are already enrolled.**

We will also continue to contact employers with very few or no registered employees in order to increase employee enrollment among those employees who are already eligible for the program. These outreach efforts will also help staff identify those employers who are no longer interested in participating in the GRH program.

## **2. Consider having a new video made to promote the Program.**

Employers occasionally request the video to promote GRH to their employees. However, the video no longer includes current information such as the rental car program and the necessity to give the taxi driver a tip. The video could also be changed to emphasize how to avoid recent problems with the program such as participants inadvertently using the wrong cab company. It will be important to evaluate the cost effectiveness of video production relative to its ability to recruit new employee registrants and determine if this is a productive use of funds. The approximate cost to update the video is \$10,000; these funds would need to be supplied in addition to the program's existing budget.

## **3. Administer a survey to employer representatives.**

The CMA program manager inquired how employers currently market GRH. This question and a number of others could be answered with an employer survey. An employer survey might also include number of employees, other commute services provided, additional contact information, and level of commitment to the GRH program. Surveys also provide an opportunity to contact employers to foster a higher level of communication and increased awareness of the GRH Program. This recommendation could be implemented as part of the existing program budget included with marketing efforts.

## **4. Evaluate the impact of expanding the rental car program countywide.**

The evaluation of the rental car program is displayed in Chapter 3 (Figure 3-14). We will conduct a similar evaluation of the countywide program in the 2004 program evaluation report.